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THE FINNISH CRISIS

In the face of impending military disaster, Finland's Government, after two weeks of internal crisis, startled the world with its decision to continue the war. Recent intelligence on the political developments of those critical weeks indicates, as set forth below, the unconstitutional procedures whereby the Government achieved the decision to protract Finland's struggle.

Soviet advances on the Karelian Isthmus by 16 June had so alarmed Finnish Cabinet officials and opposition leaders that they were again determined to seek peace. At the Cabinet's suggestion Marshal Mannerheim was asked by President Ryti to accept the position of "national leader" or Regent with full powers. This he refused. It was then proposed that Mannerheim serve as Premier with the understanding that Ryti would feign illness and resign the Presidency, thus allowing Mannerheim to assume the position of Acting President as well. This also the aged Marshal refused. It was assumed that Mannerheim's decisions were influenced partly by his recognition of his own advanced age but principally by his disappointment over the failure of Finnish leaders to heed any of his previous recommendations to seek peace with the USSR.

Government leaders then turned to Foreign Minister Henrik Ramsay as the person to form a "peace" Government. Ramsay accepted the invitation. His selection was approved by Mannerheim and by the military and opposition leaders. Upon inquiry it was confirmed that the USSR would look upon Ramsay as a suitable Premier. Ramsay at once moved to draw up a new Cabinet. By 19 June it appeared to qualified Finnish observers that the creation of the new government was only a matter of hours. Two more days passed, however, and by 21 June no government had yet taken office. The delays appear to have been the result largely of the cumbersome procedure which had to be followed and the disagreements which developed over personalities. All decisions were referred to Mannerheim's headquarters for final approval and were delayed by the Marshal's hesitations. Party representatives in the Government met with their adherents in the Diet to discuss and reach decisions on each phase of the negotiations as they progressed. Further delays were encountered in taking soundings of official Soviet attitudes.

The opposition groups appeared at first to insist on a radical reconstitution of the Government, but at length confessed that such a basic reconstruction was impossible under the circumstances. The immediate

and primary objective, they felt, must be a peace settlement. They preferred to view the proposed Cabinet as an interim regime which would later be widely revised by the exclusion of the old leaders. To attempt such a step now, most of the opposition seemed to feel, would delay the realization of the primary issue and provoke serious domestic dissension. At first, also, the opposition parties supported Paasikivi as their choice for the new Premier. This, however, was turned down by Ryti on the grounds that Paasikivi was too closely associated with the idea of yielding to Moscow, thus his choice would alarm the Germans and lower Finnish public morale. Ryti declared that Paasikivi could best be used as negotiator with the Soviets. The opposition therefore yielded this point too.

Despite these delays and disagreements, a decision to form a peace Cabinet was reached on the morning of 22 June, in which the military concurred. The Soviet Government was so informed.

Meantime, however, word of the weakening Finnish attitude had reached Berlin. The Germans moved quickly in response. By the 21st of June, German troops began to move into Hango. The Prinz Eugen steamed into the waters of the Hogland Islands south of Helsinki. The Admiral Hipper moved into the Aalands. More troops arrived on the following day. German civilians and technicians began to arrive in considerable numbers, including a certain Herr Vollmer, said to be a specialist in taking over American diplomatic establishments. German propagandists took pains to exaggerate the size of the incoming military reinforcements. Finnish authorities were given the impression that at least four motorized batallions and one armored division had been moved into the Hango area. Later Finnish intelligence indicated this particular movement probably involved no more than 4000 men, 60 tanks and 350 planes.

On 22 June the surprised Foreign Office was informed that von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, would reach Helsinki within a few hours. Von Ribbentrop's arrival was shrewdly conceived, coming as it did when German troops were already moving into southern Finland but before the Finns could have received a reply to the note they had sent to Moscow.

Details on developments of the next two days are not available. On 25 June Finnish Party leaders were informed that von Ribbentrop had arrived, and were given at least a hint that the top Government leaders were weakening in their decision for peace. The Party leaders convened their respective parliamentary groups at once, informed them of the German Foreign Minister's presence, told them that they opposed further collaboration with the Reich, and asked for a vote. The Social Democratic. Progressive and Swedish People's Party groups each voted unanimous approval of the positions taken by their leaders, and instructed their leaders to work for peace and to approve no political decisions without first consulting them. Only a third of the Agrarian representatives, however, opposed protraction of the war.

The following day, 26 June, the opposition party representatives again met with their representatives in the Cabinet. Tanner told his fellow Social Democrats that von Ribbentrop had agreed to send military reinforcements, but only to the extent of two divisions. This, Tanner declared, was insufficient as the Finnish military had maintained that at least six or seven divisions would be required. In exchange for these two divisions, Tanner said, Germany insisted on total collaboration and a promise that Finland would not conclude a separate peace. The Social Democratic representatives in response voted that the Government should continue peace negotiations and promise no further collaboration with the Germans. The Social Democrats instructed their Ministers to withdraw from the Cabinet, if the Government should fail to follow these two courses. Similar decisions were reached by the Progressive and Swedish People's Party representatives.

Apparently before the Government had been informed of the attitude of the opposition or the extent of its strength, it had notified deputies, early on 26 June, that a secret session of the Diet would be convened that evening. The deputies were told that the Government's policy would be reviewed at this meeting. During the day, however, the Government leaders were informed of the actions of the opposition parties and became alarmed over the probability that the Diet opposed further collaboration by at least 110 votes to 90. The Cabinet therefore decided, by a vote of 10-6, not to request the Diet to sanction its acquiescence in the German demands. By a similar vote the Cabinet ruled that this matter came under the head of foreign relations, not war and peace, and could therefore be resolved without recourse to the Diet. Favorable concurrences in this decision were obtained from two Finnish jurists. The six Cabinet members who dissented on both decisions comprised the five Social Democrats, including Tanner, and Kauppi, a Progressive.

Thus when the Diet met in secret session on the night of 26 June, the Government, by skillful invocation of a legal technicality, prevented the vital issues of war or peace from being brought up for discussion. According to the Finnish constitution the speaker of the Diet has sole power to set the agenda. If an issue which the deputies wish discussed is not placed on the agenda, the deputies may request the privilege of interpellation. However, no interpellation may take place until two week's notice has been given. Hakkila, a former revolutionary who has shifted to the extreme right, assumed the speaker's chair that night and presented an agenda composed only of inconsequential routine matters. At the eleventh hour the Diet thus found itself confronted with what amounted to a coup d'etat on the part of the Cabinet. Opposition leaders, determined to seek an interpellation, realized that a fortnight's delay would cause this stratagem to lose much of its force. By a majority of four Cabinet votes the country was being plunged into a new phase of intensified collaboration without discussion in the Diet and without the knowledge of the people, who had as usual been kept in ignorance of the realities of the situation.

On the morning of 27 June foreign diplomatic representatives in Helsinki were told informally that the terms contained in the Soviet reply to the Finnish note of 22 June had been found unacceptable, that plans to form a new Government had been dropped and that an official announcement would be forthcoming regarding future intentions. The Cabinet met with the Foreign Relations committee of the Diet and sought to explain its decisions in favor of collaboration and continuing the war. The Cabinet's majority insisted that the Soviet terms involved "unconditional" surrender, which would be unacceptable, and argued that Germany was alone in a position to aid Finland. The hope was expressed that the Red Army could be held at bay until an armistice was reached in the European war, by which time Finland might expect more favorable treatment from the Soviets and more sympathetic consideration from the Western Allies.

The evening of 27 June the Finnish Government publicly announced its decision to stay in the war and declared that Germany had responded favorably to an invitation to supply aid. Ramsay in later private conversations insisted that stipulations concerning the extent of German aid were not included in the agreement with Germany, though he admitted that certain types of aid had been arranged for. Ramsay's general evasiveness on the question of aid led neutral observers to believe that the agreement contained several stipulations of a military nature. To a reliable source, Ramsay explained the Government's behavior on the grounds that even a short reprieve is worthwhile when the life of a nation is threatened.

The full text of the Soviet answer has not been reported. It is known to have demanded capitulation, but not unconditional surrender, as a prerequisite to further negotiations. There is evidence that the Cabinet leaders reached their decision under German influence prior to the receipt of the Soviet reply. Qualified observers believe that, under such conditions, no terms of capitulation, however lenient, would have been accepted.

The opposition's plan of action for the future remains problematical. It had been expected that the opposition parties would withdraw their ministers from the cabinet following the Government's official announcement. Cabinet spokesmen however dissuaded the opposition from such a course by an appeal to party delegates to preserve morale and home front unity in order to give support to the troops fighting in the front lines. In response to this appeal, Tanner and the other cabinet members pledged to resignation remained at their posts. There have been reports, however, that certain opposition leaders were seeking to find a legal basis on which to form a Free Finland movement either inside or outside the country. Other reports have suggested that certain Finnish leaders including Hynninen, projected Foreign Minister in the proposed peace Cabinet, have left Finland for Sweden. The presence in Sweden of Erkko, the influential Finnish publisher, is confirmed. In Erkko's opinion the

responsibility for the "catastrophic" decision which Finland has made lies with Ryti and Ramsay.

The power of the opposition to influence or overthrow the Government appears to be severely crippled. Finnish military leaders with the exception of Mannerheim, are now strongly in favor of continuing the war. German troops in Helsinki are in a position to protect the Cabinet from any internal threat. The very leaders of the opposition were unwilling to organize effective opposition to the Government's coup or to resign when it succeeded.